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Cultural tourism in European Cities: Towards a strategic planning approach

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Cultural tourism in European Cities: Towards a strategic planning approach

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1. The rising importance of cultural tourism in European cities

Tourism accounts for 5% of all jobs and 5% of all consumer expenditure within the European Union (COM, 2001). It is one of Europe's largest economic sectors and features among the largest key industries of the 21st century. The World Tourism Organisation estimated in 2000 that the number of international arrivals in Europe would double to 720 million tourists per year by 2020 (WTO, 2000). Although it has been underestimated until quite recently, tourism has long been a central component of the economic, social and cultural shift that has left its imprint on the world system of cities in the past two decades. Even though urban tourism is one of the earliest forms of tourism in Europe, it was not considered a major source of income until the beginning of the 1990s, with the exception of capital cities, such as Paris and London, and some exceptional cases, like Bruges or Venice. Since then, interest in tourism has spread rapidly throughout many small and medium European cities, which previously have not considered themselves as tourist destinations. Bilbao, Dundee and Aix-en-Provence, are examples of small and medium-sized cities that have recently decided to promote tourism even though it has not been part of their tradition. This renewed interest can be explained by the fact that tourism is increasingly perceived as a potential means of alleviating the unprecedented crises suffered by many urban centres (Law, 2000). These crises are due to a number of broadly established factors, including the decline of industrial activities located in the vicinity of their centres, progressive loss of inhabitants and the huge difficulties caused by major office development. As urban tourism has grown very rapidly, its further development is usually conceived as a win-win strategy: it has been viewed as a boost to urban growth while supporting a renaissance of housing, since new cultural and leisure activities may serve both tourists and local residents in search of a richer and denser life (Ashworth, 2001).

In this movement, cultural tourism proves increasingly popular and is one form of tourism that is expected to witness the highest growth in the future.

The rising importance of cultural tourism in European cities can be explained by the diffusion and democratization of culture promoted from the mid of the 20th century, that led to a widening of the concept of culture; as well as by the changing patterns of tourism,

the availability of low-cost carriers, increasing holiday time and demographic factors like the ageing of the population. It also inscribes itself into a general trend of care for what is around us and a search for sustainable ways of life.

Cultural tourism is heavily dependent on the city, given its mere organisation: it is influenced by the structure of the town or city, and the localisation of the cultural sites within the urban network. A survey of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu International (1995) highlighted that 53% of European cultural attractions –museums, monuments, art galleries etc.– were located in either a major city or a town. This explains by the fact that cultural attractions have long been an important facet of urban area tourism products. European cities are especially appreciated for their huge amount of well-preserved built heritage.

However, the sole buildings and urban spaces are no longer sufficient to attract tourists in the long run. Urban heritage may not be separated from the human and living dimension of a region or a town, playing in itself an attractive role: atmosphere, shopping, people, food, crafts, nature and landscape etc (Lidgi, 2002). ‘Culture’ which is attracting tourists in a particular town is increasingly broader than the sole built and non-built heritage. *“Urban visitors are drawn by cultural, historical, architectural and ethnic attractions. Cultural tourists consume not only art, opera, and “son et lumière” in historical settings but also gourmet food and locally produced crafts”* (Judd & Fainstein, 1999, p63).

2. Tourism is not a panacea

As any kind of development, tourism may be characterised by a number negative impacts - be it from an environmental, cultural, economic or social point of view. Many stakeholders perceive tourism as all rosy at the moment, especially as they focus on its expected benefits in terms of money or image. A survey led among European local authorities in the first stage of the PICTURE project highlights that all 56 European towns surveyed deem tourism positive on the whole (Dumont *et. al.*, 2004). Only 8 of the 16 towns where tourism is already mature do speak of a need to manage tourism for it to remain positive.

Obviously, cultural tourism should not harm the heritage that motivates it. Preventing this is far from easy, especially in small and medium-sized cities, which lack the size, width and population of large cities to absorb the effects of the development of tourism.

As a summary to a literature study as well as an analysis of interviews and questionnaires realised in the context of Picture project a preliminary model of tourism impacts and their interaction has been proposed in Deliverable 3 of the project (see table 1). Impacts are grouped into three clusters and each cluster is divided into positive and negative:

- *Impacts upon urban built heritage diversity and circulation:* In this sphere, we find aspects related to the spatial organisation of places of living and transport within them. It is in this field

*) Including illustrations and references

that the consequences of tourism were seen as most problematic by local authorities. Tourists come to visit specific heritage landmarks but how can a town open these to the public without endangering them? How can it handle car and pedestrian traffic in order to allow easy use and access but still avoid an impression of "clogging" or of a town lost to its inhabitants?

- *Impacts upon urban cultural practices and representations:* This cluster of effects includes consequences of tourism on the way people think about their town, themselves, and others, as well as the way they behave. Tourism, because of its bringing into contacts different cultures, is said to influence one's cultural practices and representations. Because tourists' interest in their town, some inhabitants might develop more pride about living in a place they previously did not think much of; or on the contrary feel they have been deprived from their town. And because it puts into contact different structures, it can lead to a change in cultural practices, ranging from a choice of leisure activities (more diversity in the offer, new sports or games or public representation opportunities) to influence on gastronomy or social organisation.
- *Impacts upon urban economies:* Impacts on the economy of a town imply both increased revenue and expenses. The economic impacts of tourism appeared to be the most mentioned and valued consequences of an afflux of people to a town. Most stated among them were the creation of job opportunities, the expenses of a town and the financial benefits of tourists' spending in a town.

Economic impacts are the most independent ones, only having an influence on other impacts in terms of gentrification. Cultural and urban heritage impacts are, on the contrary, heavily intertwined, thus revealing the strong political side of urban renovation.

*) Including illustrations and references

Impacts upon urban heritage diversity	Impacts upon urban cultural practices and representations	Impacts upon urban economies
Positive:		
Urban Regeneration	Diversification, rediscovery, exchange, identity, reappropriation.	More jobs and sources of revenues
Increased protection of urban landscapes	Increased awareness of shared history.	Creation of job opportunities
Heritage valorisation	Rediscovery or keeping alive of local values and/or traditions	New fields for commercial activities
Requalification of otherwise lost places of interest	Diversification, multiplication and improvement in cultural offer	Tourists spend in local stores, restaurants, cafés, hotels.
Creation of new infrastructures	Benefits of cultural exchanges	New sources of revenue
	Changes to urban space use	Multiplier effect
	Development of short term events and animations	
Public spaces better cared for	Pride of origin or residence due to increased visibility or notoriety of a town.	Attraction of enterprises by soft location effect
	Increased feeling of safety resulting from better care of public realm	
Negative:		
Destruction, saturation, standardisation or pollution of urban landscapes	Standardisation, caricaturing, loss of authenticity, alienation, sense of invasion.	Monosectorialisation, more expenses and gentrification
Heritage erosion	Conflicts between local inhabitants and visitors	Risk of monosectorialisation and overdependence on tourism.
Tourist pollution		
Degradation or destruction of urban landscapes		
Creation of monofunctional spaces	Loss of community spirit	Augmentation of real estate prices
	Changes to urban space use	Price increase of commodities in general
Traffic, congestion and parking issue	Local alienation, feeling of loss of town	
Globalisation and standardisation of architecture	Obliteration of alternative histories	Increased expenses for a town
Prettification and petrification of urban spaces	Loss or theatricalisation of local values and/or customs	
	Adverse stereotyping	

Table 1: Positive and negative impacts of tourism upon heritage diversity, cultural representations and local economies.

3. Objectives of the PICTURE project

Considering these challenges, PICTURE aims to develop a strategic urban governance framework for the sustainable management of cultural tourism within small and medium-sized cities, which gather 60% of the European population. This framework will help to establish, evaluate and benchmark integrated tourism policies at the local level with a view to

*) Including illustrations and references

maximising the benefits of tourism upon the conservation and enhancement of built heritage diversity and urban quality of life.

To accomplish the above goal, the following scientific objectives are pursued:

1. Evaluate the dynamics of the effects of tourism, at large, upon the social, environmental and economic wealth of European small and medium-sized cities, considering the built heritage diversity and urban quality of life characterising such environments;
2. Identify and benchmark innovative urban governance strategies for sustainable development of cultural tourism within small and medium-sized cities;
3. Provide local governments and decision makers with tools to facilitate the assessment of the impact of tourism in a locality, with particular regard to built heritage issues and relevant quality of life parameters, in order to improve their strategies, plans, and policies;
4. Capitalise and disseminate existing knowledge and good practices of sustainable cultural tourism in Europe, focussing upon the effects of the sector upon the conservation and enhancement of built heritage diversity and urban quality of life.

4. Towards strategic policy-making

To avoid or control the adverse effects and maximise positive outcomes mentioned here above, a tourism strategy should be preliminary defined and regularly updated according to the results of continuous monitoring programmes.

The importance of planning for tourism development is obvious, yet it is often overlooked or reduced to too tight a time frame. In many destinations, tourism is still considered as a self-regulating activity (Van Der Borg 2003). According to Cazes & Potier (1998) it is difficult to find a Local Authority ready to take political decisions related to tourism. In the best case, some measures are aimed at managing traffic jams and parking problems by creating parks outside the cities. Most of the times, measures are handled in a reactive rather than proactive way.

The main stages of a commonly agreed framework for tourism strategic planning as adapted by Orbasli (2000) from Laws (1995), Page (1995) and Boniface (1995) combined with physical planning procedure suggested for historic towns (Feilden and Jokilehto 1998), are briefly summarised in table 2.

*) Including illustrations and references

Preparatory stages:

- Identification of the current situation: research including evaluation of the site, community, economic and political background;
- Forecasting growth, development patterns and future events;
- Definition of key principles guiding the tourism strategy;
- Identification of development objectives;
- Identification of possible funding sources.

Effective long-term planning, based on sound methodological approaches:

- Elaboration of an action plan for each development objective;
- Coordination of communication and product development;
- Consultation and community involvement (as essential);
- Identification of investment incentives (public and private involvement and partnerships);
- Assessment of feasibility and desirability of options.

Implementation:

- Support and assessment of quality;
- Continuous monitoring and periodic review.

Table 2: Main stages of a tourism strategy.

5. Key principles for sustainable strategic cultural policies

Defining key principles that will guide the identification of development objectives and the elaboration of the action plan to achieve these objectives is a crucial aspect of any tourism strategy. The subsidiarity principle implies that those principles should and will vary from one place to another. Still the PICTURE project takes the view that the following four key principles should form the basis of any sustainable cultural tourism strategy in small- and medium-sized cities.

5.1. Key principle 1: Stakeholder cooperation

One major difficulty in managing tourism is that it requires collaboration between a wide number of stakeholders. Urban heritage typically does not have a simple owner; there are many users and claimants to urban space, linked or conflicting through a complex web of relations. A city or a town is only ever partly managed and key players emerge from these ownership and management patterns. The total cast of players takes on many shapes, includes a wide range of disciplines and backgrounds, with at times conflicting interests, agendas and accountability structures.

Recurrent conflicts or incidents are likely to occur between actors or key players, in relation to conservation and tourism in historic towns and town centres (Orbasli, 2000):

*) Including illustrations and references

- between central and local government (policy and control);
- between political (short term objectives) and professional (administration) priorities in local government;
- between different departments of government (at national and local level), for instance between urban development and urban conservation departments;
- between the public and the private sectors;
- between the local market and international operators;
- between community and local administration;
- within the community itself;
- between community and visitors.

Horizontal integration implies coordinating a series of stakeholders, either from the public or private sectors, working in the domains of transport, accommodation, cultural services, urban planning etc. Vertical integration consists of coordinating the different spatial scales and decision-making levels involved in a typical tourism strategy. These two forms of integration usually raise serious challenges for small and medium-sized cities, especially since the tourism sector has mostly grown haphazardly and displays one of the most fragmented structure of all.

The collaboration between different administrative units forming a common urban agglomeration is key to effective tourism policy. In France, some “Communautés Urbaines” (Urban Communities), a decision-making level that federates different municipalities, are now competent for the planning and management of tourism. Those Communities are in charge of the development of the local tourism offer, the valorisation of this offer and the mobilisation and animation of local actors. It also develops an activity of follow-up and evaluation of tourism policies at the level of the entire territory covered by its different municipalities (Doria & Dupuy, 2003). While European cities benefit from the relative weakening of States as social and political integration unit, they progressively engage in complex strategies intertwining local and regional levels in the view of developing a specific cultural policy (D’Angelo, 2002 ; D’Angelo & Vespérini, 2001).

5.2. Key principle 2- Respect of cultural diversity.

Cultural tourism has to contribute to the conservation and further development of the heritage that motivates it. Accordingly all sections of the population should be given the same access to its policies and various forms of heritage should be treated equally. Specific efforts should be devoted to the involvement of weaker groups and urban areas, so as to allow empowerment and a creation, control and dissemination of their own culture. This relates to issues of authenticity in the face of cultural exchanges and constant evolution of cultures.

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Enhancing the legibility and attractiveness of heritage can sometimes lead to highly contestable extrapolations and over-simplifications. A recurrent criticism is that the “picturesque” prevails over the respect of authenticity, yet a pillar principle of the conservation action mentioned in all heritage charters: Venice (1964), Florence (1982), and Toledo (1987). One may wonder about heritage diversity when the same materials are seen everywhere: tinted glass and steel, hard coatings, monopolistic urban furniture, grey pavements, and flashy sodium lighting. The tourist “product” tends to become uniform. Revitalist and pastiche approaches have become a common approach, which is often supported by local planning authorities and compounded by the availability of mass-produced “traditional” materials (Orbasli, 2000).

Tourism in the urban realm is predominantly an external activity. Accordingly the emphasis of conservation often focuses on external aspects, streets and public spaces. In this context, façadism is a potential risk as well as replication of historic styles (pastiche). Tourism leaves an extra imprint in urban spaces through enhancement of “traditional” architectural features. Besides excessive heritage designations are changing some places into landscapes (Puig, 2000).

The prettification approach may be pushed very far, as illustrates the town of Tozeur in Tunisia. Even though outside Europe, it seems worth mentioning for its exemplifying qualities. The Al-Hawadif sector in Tozeur is an example of transformation of a centre of social activity into a kind of scenery. A leisure landscape (“La Ville des rêves,” “the dream city in English”) has been “built” upon a historic substratum to answer to tourists’ imagination and expectations. Tourists are maintained in a permanent euphoria through browsing through these “fictionalised and derealised universes” (Winkin 1998). Guides are also participating in this arrangement of the reality in order to avoid breaking the “world’s enchantment” (Puig 2000).

Differentiation of such areas from the rest of the city can lead to the construction of enclaves, also called “tourist bubbles” by Judd and Fainstein (1999). While tourist areas (often in the centre or on waterfronts) are heavily patrolled against “undesirables”, other parts of the city are often allowed to deteriorate and become centres of criminal activities, anomie, and physical decay (Judd & Fainstein 1999). The ordinary fabric of daily life in the city outside those enclaves hence seems hostile or uninviting to the visitors. “Separating and specialising an urban zone, depending on how condensed its heritage is, makes citizens turn their backs on it to a considerable and detrimental degree, which constitutes a rejection and impoverishment and a kind of distortion and impermeabilisation that is contrary to the positive value of tourist flows.” (TTR, 2004).

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Boston offers a counter example, of a town that managed to integrate tourism in the daily life of the town and did not need to embark on widescale prettification. It is one of the premier tourist cities in America, but it occurred almost by accident. It does not need to achieve a Disneyland-like sense of cleanliness and order to attract tourists, and tourism is not the only force shaping it.. Tourism planning is actually underdeveloped in Boston, but urban planning and design, historic preservation, and struggles over urban space are not. As a result, Boston managed to preserve its historic neighbourhoods that are now attracting tourists. (Judd & Fainstein 1999)

5.3. Key principle 3: Public participation

Public participation is now acknowledged as a condition to ensure a sustainable development of tourism. *“The tourist flows produce necessarily changes in the local community. The sustainability is strongly linked to the acceptability of these changes, and more precisely, to the notion of acceptable change. If the change is acceptable, the tourist development by which it is produced is considered as sustainable”* (Wall, 2003). The role of development for community has to be rethought, for a high-quality environment to live in can then be sustained as a high-quality environment to visit. Inhabitants can be invited to participate to decisions related to tourism development and management. Too often, historic towns have become gentrified centres of tourist interests, where citizen participation is often reduced to decision-making for communal spaces or to the availability of information on local council activities on town hall notice boards (Orbasli, 2000). As city authorities are not isolated from economic pressures, involving the public in the decision-making processes related to tourism through working groups, steering committees, or any other means appears as an important aspect. The European Agenda 21 for tourism furthermore encourages by the Agenda 21 policy, and in particular, public participation in decision-making processes (Eurocult21, 2005).

Participation means democratic participation of citizens in the thinking about, formulation, exercise and evaluation of cultural tourism policies and actions. This should mean developing methodologies and mechanisms to empower local people and grassroots voices, as well as ways to foster openness and transparency from private actors or authorities. Objectives of cultural tourism strategies should hence be submitted to a debate with local communities in order to avoid rejection of these objectives, and the actions that support them, afterwards.

5.4. Key principle 4: Continuous monitoring and follow-up

As the tourist activity is evolving throughout time, the effects, its costs and benefits are difficult to predict and are fluctuating. It is necessary to monitor them continuously in order to regularly feed the management policy with fresh information.

The development of tourism monitoring boards would be welcomed. But one should pay special attention to the methodological choices that are made when developing such boards.

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For instance, in most tourist statistics, only paying visits of cultural sites are recognised as “cultural tourism” (Amirou 2000). To admire the architecture of an Italian place for example is not cultural according to this approach. Another example is that urban tourism has been for a long time under-evaluated because flow statistics were only considering stays of more than four days (Cazes & Potier 1998).

The results of a survey carried out during task 1.1 of the PICTURE research highlighted that most cities have no idea about the financial benefits of tourism in their town (Dumont *et. al.*, 2004).

Organisation of regular qualitative surveys would also be helpful. Monitoring of visitors’ satisfaction is crucial. The attraction exerted by a piece of cultural heritage is actually evolving. It is successively subject to different kinds of attention or value registers. Curious objects can suddenly be valued for their aesthetics or ordinary object considered as historic or object of collection. On the contrary, objects previously valued can lose their aura and be denied, or even damaged by visitors (Amirou 2000). Monitoring should also include regular surveys among the local population and inhabitants in order to check that local quality of life is preserved.

Objectives of tourism strategies should hence be formulated in a way to allow their continuous monitoring and the adoption of alternative actions in case of deviation from the initial targets, or obvious rejection from the locals, endangering diversity and long-term life of a town.

6. Conclusion

Due to factors such as globalisation, and the passage of an industrial to a service society, tourism is assuming more and more importance in today’s world. Cultural tourism is one of the segment of tourism that is expected to witness the highest growth. It is also a form of tourism that is very much liked by authorities because it carries an aura of sustainability. Cultural tourism, however, like any form of tourism can lead to a whole series of positive and negative impacts, especially when developed at great length or when under large pressure. Urban renaissance and community solidarity cannot be reached by the mere development of imposed cultural projects. A pro-active and participative strategy appears necessary to reach these goals.

There is a growing convergence throughout Europe in the procedures adopted to develop and regulate tourism within urban areas. Typically these procedures are based on strategic policies. In those conditions there is a risk that cultural tourism becomes an overtly “marketing” matter with few if any consideration for built heritage diversity and local quality of life.

The PICTURE project proposes to develop specific methods and tools to assess and

*) Including illustrations and references

monitor the likely long-term, direct, indirect and cumulative effects of cultural tourism, as well as their evolution upon built heritage diversity and quality of life. It promotes innovative approaches of urban governance and pro active management of tourism advancing cultural tourism as a means of fostering urban revitalisation and community sustainability. These approaches should foster cooperation, respect cultural diversity, function along participative lines, with the idea that short term should not endanger long term and that the search for global framing should not harm local differences.

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